Date: **Friday 15 November 2002**

Venue: **Penlan Social Club, Penlan, Swansea**

Title: **Communities that Care – A new kind of prevention programme**

Yn anffodus, nid yw'r papur yma ar gael trwy gyfrwng y Gymraeg

Introduction

Communities that Care (CtC) was established by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 1997 in response to growing public concern about the pressures and stresses facing children and young people in their communities and the resulting real and perceived increases in youth crime, drug abuse, school failure and school age pregnancy. Communities that Care establishes a working partnership between local people, agencies and organisations in order to build safer communities where children and young people are valued, respected and encouraged to reach their full potential.

The idea is beautifully simple, in order to prevent a problem we must first find out what factors increase the chance of it occurring and then find ways to reduce those factors. Yet when the Social Exclusion Unit studied the prospects of youth at risk in 1999 they found an approach to local and national services for young people which were still driven by a history of treating the symptoms of social problems – crisis rather than prevention.

The Risk and Protection Model

CtC with the help of academics at Oxford University have established that there are 17 risk factors in the UK which link clearly with youth crime. These factors fall within the 4 main areas of young people's lives, their families, their schools, the community in which they live and their group of friends. The higher the level of risk, the greater the chance that young people will become involved in youth crime.

Comparisons between CtC and preventative health campaigns concerned with cancers, heart disease and strokes are especially appropriate because the basic approach is the same; reducing risk and increasing protection. By focusing their preventative initiatives on risk and protection, public health campaigns are succeeding in reducing the rate of premature deaths through heart failure. Even more encouraging, those who put the campaigners' advice into practice are protecting themselves against more than just heart disease. In other words, the risk and protective factors overlap with those for lung cancer and emphysema. The major risk factors for adolescent problems overlap in a similar way and the 17 risk factors mentioned above also apply to drug abuse, school age pregnancy and school failure.

Measuring Risk Factors

It is possible to measure fairly effectively the level of each of these risk factors in any community of young people in the UK using survey tools, developed and refined over the past 4 years. One of these tools, the youth survey, is delivered to 11 – 16 year olds and, along with other data collected locally, is used to identify those risk factors which are particularly elevated in an area. Earlier this year a report called Youth at Risk? was published by CtC which provides a base line of risk and protective factors across the UK. This has provided a useful comparison for local data. Surveys undertaken in three local authority areas in South Wales suggest that the most pronounced risk factor affecting young people living in South Wales is that of ***Community Disorganisation and Neglect***. A community characterised by high levels of this risk factor would have high levels of vandalism, low surveillance and general disrepair. Housing management may be implicated – ranging from poor maintenance and inadequate security to policies for allocating homes that lead to artificially high densities of vulnerable families.

The level of this risk factor in the lives of young people was significantly higher for the majority of areas so far surveyed in South Wales than the national average.

The following graph shows the response of young people to a number of statements about their community:

> There are lots of fights in my neighbourhood
> There is crime and/ or drug selling in my neighbourhood
> There are lots of empty or abandoned buildings in my neighbourhood
> There is lots of graffiti in my neighbourhood
> I feel unsafe in my neighbourhood after dark.
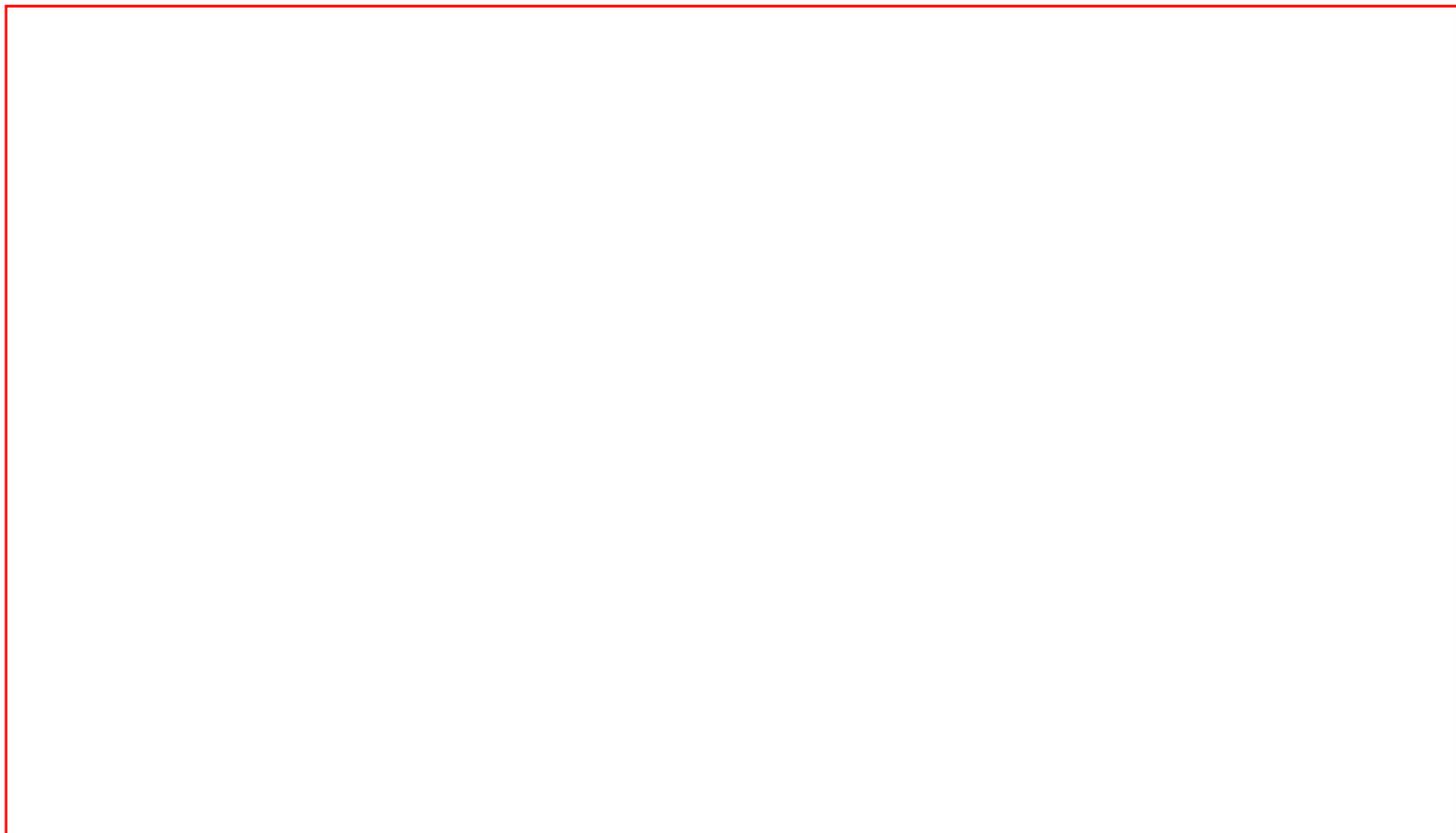
The more statements they agreed with the greater the indication is of disorganisation in their communities. This graph, taken from the Youth at Risk report shows that there is a strong correlation between young people who live in areas characterised as disorganised communities and young people who have been excluded from school, bully other pupils and play truant from school. Similar correlations can be shown between levels of exposure to Community Disorganisation and other problems such as alcohol abuse and youth crime.

If we are correct that overall, young people growing up in Wales are more likely than young people in other parts of the UK to be growing up in areas characterised by high levels of community disorganisation and neglect then the risk factor model tells us that this has significant implications for health, criminal justice, education and drug abuse agencies and practitioners.

There is a plan to repeat the national risk and protective audit survey in 2003 but this time to use a larger sample and make provision for comparisons between England, Scotland and Wales. This will provide some very interesting data in the light of devolution and the increasingly diversity of social policy in the three countries.

Unique Profile of Risk and Protective Factors.

Our research shows that each community of young people, whether that is a geographic community or a school community will exhibit a different profile of risk and protective factors in their lives. Even though two communities may show similar levels of drug or alcohol misuse or get involved in incidences of youth crime to the same degree, it is possible and indeed likely, that they will exhibit a quite different profile of risk and protective factors underlying those problems. The more we know about that profile of risk and protection the more accurately we can 'treat' that community of young people to use a medical metaphor. If we get the diagnosis right then we may be more sure of using our resources on an effective cure.

Advantages of the Risk and Protection Model.

There are several advantages to using a risk and protective model like this to predict and therefore prevent youth crime and other symptoms of social exclusion:

a) The model facilitates multi-agency working. In effect by measuring risk and protection we create a joined up data set relevant to a range of agencies and of considerable interest to people who live in those communities. If we don't just measure the problems but also measure the underlying causes, we see that there is considerable overlap in those factors. This allows agencies to pool resources

b) It enables more effective use of those resources since we are not guessing at the underlying reasons for youth crime, we actually have a clear picture of the risk factor profile and we know that if we reduce those risk factors we will make a significant impact. This level of evidence tends to reduce the kind of 'interagency turf wars' sometimes experienced in new planning initiatives.

c) It allows us to be predictive and therefore preventative. This model allows us to justify real preventative work because it gives us accurate information about the precursors to crime and other problems that act at a whole

community level.

d) It provides comparisons, allowing us to set realistic targets and measure progress. Having the ability to measure risk and protective factors, allows us to compare them from one community to another. This allows us also to measure change over time and to set realistic targets.

Work in Swansea

In 2001 a large survey of 11,026 young people between the ages of 11 and 16 was carried out in Swansea. This data is currently being analysed and the findings fed into various initiatives across the City and County of Swansea. The data allows communities and agencies to see which risk factors are elevated in various areas of the city. Since there is a well proven link between these risk factors and the level of youth crime it is fair to say that any interventions in the area which are effective in reducing any of these elevated risk factors will in time have a significant impact on youth crime rates. This gives us a blueprint therefore for real preventative action.

The next step is to look at the research about effective interventions and CtC provides communities with a 'menu' of best practice examples. The 'promising approaches' that it describes are existing prevention programmes that have a track record of success in reducing risk and increasing protection. In the presentation planned for the 15th of November the Swansea Communities that Care programme members will describe the work that they have done over the past 4 years on the East side of the city to both measure risk factors and apply evidence based solutions.